

African American Occupations by Category from 1897 and 1900 Wilmington City Directories

Occupation Category (sample occupations listed)	1897	1900
Laborer Laborer, Scavenger, Janitor	1,326	1,524
Domestic Butler, Cook, Steward, Waiter, Laundress	1,087	133
Railroad Worker Car Coupler, Porter	198	131
Cargo/Transport Trades Drayman, Driver, Stevedore, Teamster	179	150
Skilled Artisans/Trades Blacksmith, Brickmason, Printing trades, Watchmaker, Plumber, Stonecutter	145	105
Building Trades Builder, Carpenter, Contractor, Painter	143	133
Service Barber, Butcher, Boot and Shoemaker, Hostler, Merchant Tailor	119	82
Retail Grocer, Huckster, Provisions, Salesman	63	57
Professional Attorney, Educator, Minister, Doctor	59	67
Foodservice Baker, Cook-shop, Restaurant, Saloon	45	32
Government Postal Worker, Health Officer, Police	39	9
Industrial Engineer, Machinist, Miller	35	43
Clerical Bookkeeper, Clerk, Manager	21	19
Maritime Boatman, Sailor, Ship Carpenter	10	11
Cotton Industry Grader, Sampler, Tier	9	1
Total Occupations	3,478	2,497

The remaining 32% of the city's black workers in 1897 were employed in skilled, retail, service, government, and professional occupations. Of these, the greatest number were associated with the railroads, building trades, skilled trades, and with work associated with the port as stevedores, draymen, and drivers.⁹ These categories together were represented by 665 workers, well over half of the non-domestic workers or unskilled laborers in the city.¹⁰ Two of these categories, skilled artisans and building trades, represented areas that traditionally offered prosperity to African Americans in the city. Some of the city's oldest and wealthiest African American families such as the Howes, Norwoods, Howards, and Sadgwars had their roots in the city's building trades well before the Civil War, and fathers passed the trade to

⁹ Stevedores and draymen were a unique category of workers in Wilmington. Traditionally considered unskilled workers by the U. S. Department of Labor, these workers were held in high esteem in Wilmington because of their importance to the port. For the import/export trade, the faster these men could load or off-load a ship meant real money to the brokerage and manufacturing firms in the city and elsewhere in the world. Their skills were prized and because of the importance of the trade, bonds were required of stevedores to ensure that their work would be done in a timely manner and that their employees would be promptly paid. This concept adds another level of confusion to the understanding of the stevedore/drayman trade. Stevedores are generally understood to be the workers who loaded and off-loaded the ship cargoes. Draymen and teamsters transported cargo between the docks and homes, railroad depots, or warehouses throughout the city. Draymen commanded one horse or mule, and teamsters used a team of animals to pull larger loads. Draymen worked toward purchase of their equipment in order to maximize profit and the purchase of other drays to hire other drivers to work for them.

¹⁰ There were a total of 3,478 black workers reported in the city. Of that number, 2,344 were domestic workers or laborers. The remaining workforce, 1,134 workers, was dominated by this skilled category of railroad workers, building tradesmen, skilled artisans and tradesmen, and port drivers.